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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how to effectively teach students who learn differently. Teaching method and learning style theory and research are relevant in addressing this issue because many such students are able to excel in certain areas but not in others. The paper uses the example of a student who excelled only in Bible education and art, explaining that such classes are taught differently than other classes. Many teachers deliver information in ways that only some students understand easily, teaching to students who are more analytic than global learners. Students must then be analytic learners in order to effectively process information presented in this manner. Most students (particularly younger students) do not learn analytically. Society focuses on traditional teaching and evaluation methods. Standardized tests are biased against global processors. Current teaching and assessing methods are too narrow and rigid to cover most students' range of abilities, knowledge, and understanding. The concept of multiple intelligences is relevant to this issue, though few schools work to develop all intelligences in all students. The paper presents suggestions for effectively teaching and assessing global learners. It also describes how to teach students who have visual perceptual problems and who are sensitive to light. (SM)

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Teaching the Learning-Different Student

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A 17-year-old male was referred for psychoeducation assessment and intervention due to poor academic performance in all subject areas with the exception of Bible and Art and he was excellent in sports. The parents were concerned because he had performed better in previous years and his teachers indicate that he is not performing up to his potential. Why would a student not do well in other subject-matter content? The notion is that the content of the Bible is usually taught differently than for other academic content; and that the student is learning-different rather than learning-disabled. Teaching method and learning style theory and research are relevant in addressing the phenomenon.

The purpose of this article is to address how to effectively teach students who are not necessarily disabled or poorly motivated rather who learn differently. This type of scenario occurs very frequently in the work of psychoeducation assessment and intervention that it merits some dialogue. Many students have the ability to learn but "fall through the cracks." Some are labeled learning-disabled and placed in Special Education classes and often regress in academic performance; and others remain in regular classes, do poorly and eventually drop out of school.

If a person could learn Bible and Art well why could he not learn other subject-matter content equally well or well enough to pass? Teaching method and learning style immediately came to the forefront of the thinking process. Brainstorming further for alternative explanations included (a) a strong interest in Biblical content; (b) positive reinforcement for Biblical content from significant people in his life; (c) lack of general ability; (d) poor study habits; and (e) lack of interest in school and more interest in sports and girls. These variables had to be eliminated before arriving at the possibility of teaching method or instructional delivery and learning style. The client's parents were religious and would reinforce him for doing well in Bible, but they had a desire for him to do as well in other subject-matter areas. The client had to maintain a certain grade-point average to play sports which he loved and should motivate him to pass all of his classes if he could. School was enjoyable enough for him due to his participation in sports and the accolades which accompany it. Poor study habit was the only factor left which could be assessed in a qualitative or inferential manner; and it was the reason given by the student for failing other academic subjects. This reason was acknowledged and validated but was not felt to be an adequate explanation.

Intellectual ability, academic achievement, personality as rated by his parents, and learning style were formally assessed. The results showed average intellectual ability, reading at his grade level, to be anxious and socially withdrawn as perceived by his parents, and to be a global learner. This set of data would lead to an understanding as to why the student did well in Bible and Art while failing other subjects and to recommendations for teaching students who learn differently.

One needs to think about how Sunday School lessons are taught and how a minister delivers his/her sermons to appreciate why everyone listens; even a young child goes away with an understanding of the main point or a point. Biblical content is taught in parables, examples, music, illustrations, pictures, and drama.. Some people even shout and cry when they hear

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something they understand or identify with on some level. The head (cognitions), the heart (emotions), and the body (kinesthetics), and even touching and feeling books and other materials (tactual) are all involved simultaneously on many occasions. One needs only to think about how Jesus taught and perhaps why he taught the way He did. He taught in parables, did show and tell (performed miracles), and walked with his disciples and other followers (kinesthetic/movement). It is imagined that Jesus, called the "Master Teacher" wanted everyone within the sound of his voice to not only hear but to understand; therefore, the teachings were delivered in these illustrative ways.

Many teachers teach or deliver information in ways that only some students understand easily and quickly. In other words, they teach to students that are more analytic rather than global learners. Analytic teachers engage in fact-by-fact development of a concept in sequence until a student begins to understand. The recipient of the teaching must be an analytic learner in order to effectively process information presented in this manner. Most learners do not learn analytically rather globally. According to the Dunn and Dunn, the younger learners are the more global. Their research show that young children start out global and by the secondary level more than 50 percent of all learners remain primarily global; 85 percent of students having any difficulty learning are global. Most gifted children with an intelligence quotient (IQ) of 145 are global (Cody, 1983) learners are global and most under achievers are global. Yet most teachers deliver instruction analytically and require their students to input, process, and output information analytically (by multiple choice tests). Performance-based assessment and other non-analytic procedures of assessing learning are appropriate for the global learner. All too often one encounters educators (school administrators, teachers) who are not open to continuing education related to teaching and assessing the majority of learners in classrooms.

Our society is focused on traditional methods of teaching, primarily and determining whether learning has occurred in single and traditional modes. At this very moment as this article is being written, a news item is being flashed on the television; a philanthropist has contributed hundreds of millions of dollars to eradicate or at least improve reading in a certain southern state. The generous donor commented "that reading is the only way a person can learn and be successful in school." The immediate thought was that these millions of dollars will not be effectively spent if the learning and reading styles of students are not addressed; and if instructional delivery professionals do not engage in continuing education related to teaching and learning styles.

Another indication of how our society is focused on the analytic learner is the use of standardized tests that are biased against the global processor. This may very well account for the success of the top 10 percent of the population. The methods of teaching and assessing are too narrow and rigid to cover the range of abilities, knowledge and understanding of the majority of learners. In an article on "Learning Styles Around the World", Price and Milgram (1993) found gifted and creative students in seven different countries to be highly self-motivated and with a strong preference for kinesthetic versus visual learning.

The concept of multiple intelligences by Gardner (1985, 1991) is relevant. According to him, there are seven basic intelligences: Verbal Linguistic, Logical/Mathematical, Visual/Spatial, Body/Kinesthetic, Musical/Rhythmic, Interpersonal, and Intrapersonal. He concludes that

everyone possess these seven, but schools tend to develop only the first two to any extent. The remaining five intelligences compare well with the characteristics of global learners supported by theory and research of other proponents of diversity in learning and problem solving (Dunn & Dunn, 1978,1979; Gregorc, 1985; McCarthy, 1987; Woolfolk, 1993).

Dunn & Dunn (1993) indicate that global learners (or workers) appear to work with distractors; concentrate better with sound (music or talking in the background), soft lighting, an informal seating arrangement, and some form of intake (eating or drinking). In addition, global learners (or workers) need frequent breaks while studying and prefer to work on several tasks simultaneously; they prefer to study (or work) with others and to structure their learning in their own way at their own pace. The Dunns have published hundreds of research articles and several books in the area of learning styles, as well as, instruments to measure learning or productivity style. They emphasize that global processing is not better or worse than analytic processing of information, it is only different.

Educational practitioners from kindergarten to graduate school are excellent analytic deliverers of instruction and retrievers of information. However, a large percentage of learners are not reached effectively. How are global learners, who are learning-different, taught effectively and assessed appropriately? The following are suggestions:

- Begin with the general and eventually work to the specific
- Begin with interesting stories or relevant materials
- Begin the teaching-learning process through the learner's strongest perceptual modality and rotate through all other modalities (Dunn and Dunn)
- Revive discovery learning in the classroom
- Provide problem-solving experiences
- Use a variety of teaching strategies as dictated by the individual learner's style and conditions under which s/he learns best
- Use multisensory materials beginning with tactual, hands-on, manipulatives
- Capitalize on the strong need for movement found in global learners.
- Make use of parables, analogies, stories, anecdotes, games, and jokes to make points
- Provide for assessment via performance, essay tests, and oral tests
- Allow students to create materials and share their creations

Some students who have visual perceptual problems and are sensitive to light (especially fluorescent) present with many problems which result in reading difficulties and poor comprehension. The problem was discovered by Helen Irlen in the early 70's and are characterized by omission of words, inserting words, rereading words and lines, and misreading words and lines; losing their place and using their finger or marker; and the reading material becomes blurry or moves. These symptoms are assessed by using the Irlen Reading Perceptual Scale (1988, 1999). Students presenting with the Irlen Syndrome (originally called "scotopic sensitivity syndrome") are best taught as global learners, the use of prescribed colored lenses, and the use of materials used for the blind. In addition, the following procedures are recommended:

- Use colored paper rather than white or glossy paper to write information or the

appropriate tinted overlay (unless the person has the tinted lenses

- Test the student orally and permit the use of audio and/or video taped assignments often
- Lessen the requirement to copy from the board or from a book
- Encourage the use of computer and spelling checker
- Use taped books and other materials created for the blind
- Permit the student to use summaries, synopses, Cliff notes, shorter versions of books, and the beginnings and endings of chapters
- Permit discussion of content to compensate for what could not be read

In summary, contemporary teaching appear to continually be traditional with an emphasis on the analytic learner; and to disregard diversity in learning. The research indicates that most learners are global; therefore, the learning and assessment of the majority of students are inefficient. There is the notion that analytic learners are "smarter"; the research does not bear that out provided teaching and learning takes place with diversity taken into consideration. Educators have been exposed to many methods of teaching and some try one method and move on to another. It is recommended that no method should be discarded rather used for the appropriate learner.

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